

OPINION

THE RECORD

Take action on Darfur

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Wednesday, March 16, 2005

THE BUSH administration may be dragging its feet on stopping genocide in Darfur, but a growing grass-roots movement could change the White House's appalling inaction.

Human rights advocates, college students, churches and other religious groups are determined to force President Bush to take a leadership role in stopping the deaths of an estimated 10,000 people a month in Sudan.

All Americans should join this groundswell. Otherwise, the solemn promise of "Never again" - doing nothing in the face of evil - is empty and meaningless.

New Jersey is a focal point in this effort. Sen. Jon Corzine has played a central role in pushing for U.S. action and recently introduced a bill that would be effective and cost very little. It would expand an African peacekeeping force to patrol the region where atrocities have occurred, provide equipment and technical assistance, institute a no-fly zone and an arms embargo, and create a U.S. envoy for Darfur to pressure the United Nations to impose sanctions on Sudan and bring war criminals to justice.

In the Legislature, Assemblyman William Payne, D-Newark, is a sponsor of a bill that would prohibit investment of state pension funds in companies doing business in Sudan. The bill has passed the Assembly and is now pending - some would say languishing - in the Senate. Several other states are pursuing similar legislation. Quick action could put New Jersey in the forefront of a divestiture campaign.

New Jersey is also the headquarters for the Darfur Rehabilitation Project, started by Darfurians living in the United States anguished by the suffering in their homeland. The project's board includes faculty from Seton Hall University. The group is lobbying for humanitarian aid, intervention by the world community, education for the children in refugee camps, and conflict resolution that would bring peace to the region.

The project's president, AbdelBagy AbuShanab, said this week at a meeting in Paramus: "The situation in Darfur is getting worse and worse all the time. The world community said encouraging things but did not do anything encouraging. We are depending on good-hearted people."

Tomorrow at 3 p.m., Save Darfur, a national coalition of human rights and religious groups, is sponsoring a moment of silence on college campuses for the victims of genocide and a four-day campaign to pressure members of Congress to act.

You can participate by learning more about the crisis and by spreading the word, such as hosting a discussion group to watch the movie "Hotel Rwanda." Most important, write letters to members of Congress urging them to vote for Mr.

Corzine's bill, which is also sponsored by Sen. Sam Brownback, R-Kan., and has bipartisan support.

These letters can be powerful weapons in the battle to stop the crimes against humanity that are being committed in Darfur: murder, including the killing of children, rape, torture and the wholesale destruction of villages and land. More than 250,000 people are believed to have died so far in the two-year genocidal campaign, and 2 million people have been displaced.

Your letters and contributions can also help bring relief to hundreds of thousands in refugee camps where malnutrition and disease are rampant and where outbreaks of famine are feared.

As Holocaust survivor and Nobel laureate Elie Wiesel said last summer about Darfur: "How can a citizen of a free country not pay attention? How can anyone, anywhere not feel outraged? How can a person, whether religious or secular, not be moved by compassion? And above all, how can anyone who remembers remain silent?"

- The Web sites where more information is available include savedarfur.org, darfurgenocide.org and africaaction.org.

Members of the Darfur Rehabilitation Project are also available to speak to North Jersey schools, churches and community groups. The project's Web site is darfurrehab.org.